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# To Know Us is to Love Us: Public Diplomacy and International Broadcasting in Contemporary Russia and China

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## **Keywords:**

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## **Abstract:**

China and Russia have devoted significant resources to developing their international broadcasting capacity as an instrument of public diplomacy. Focusing on CCTV-N (China) and RT (Russia), this paper discusses the strategies each has developed to communicate with international audiences and further the foreign policy ambitions of policymakers in Beijing and Moscow. It highlights the differences between the two stations, namely CCTV-N's ambition to rectify perceived distortions in the global flow of news about China, and RT's focus on reporting events in the US. Hence the case-studies expose the fine-line between propaganda and public diplomacy.

The success of soft power - 'the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes' (Nye, 2011: 21) - depends on communication via public diplomacy to make sure ideals, values, policies and behaviour are attractive to a target population. A term first used in 1965 by Edmund Gullion, public diplomacy refers to 'the process by which direct relations with people in another country are pursued' by state and non-state actors 'to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented' (Sharp, 2007: 6). Jowett and O'Donnell (2012: 287) have provided a necessarily broad and inclusive definition of this activity:

Public diplomacy [...] deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communications between those whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process of intercultural communications.

According to a taxonomy developed by Cull (2008) public diplomacy is defined by five key areas of activity: Listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy and international broadcasting. International broadcasting – described by Monroe Price (2003: 53) as an 'elegant term for ... the use of electronic media by one society to shape the opinion of the people and leaders of

another' – is an instrument of public diplomacy that is just as relevant now as it ever was. International broadcasting connects, indeed overlaps with the other four areas in Cull's taxonomy; but it benefits from being structurally separate from other public diplomacy activities since its credibility (and therefore its success) hinges on providing a professional and trustworthy news service. One of the most important challenges facing all international broadcasting stations used as part of a national public diplomacy campaign is how to strike a balance between practicing, and being seen to practice, professional 'objective' journalism while simultaneously serving the interests of the state they represent (Price, 2003: 51). This is particularly taxing for those international broadcasters whose architecture is embedded within the state system (as in China), or for those acting on behalf of states involved in serious diplomatic predicaments and international crises (as in Russia). The question in such circumstances is how to avoid the stigma- the stench - of propaganda, an activity that cannot escape its historical pejorative associations.

This paper discusses how international broadcasting works and is organised to help China and Russia advance their soft power and their public diplomacy ambitions. The field is only just recognising the value of comparison: As Robin Brown has noted, research on public diplomacy is 'dominated by studies of single countries but it is clear that similar problems and issues recur. It is clear that there are variations in the organization and conceptualization of external communication' (Brown; see also Pamment, 2013). The strongest point of similarity is the level of commitment to, and investment in growing their international broadcasting capacity (discussed below). Moreover, it is clear that

both Russia and China continue to design their outreach around what Pamment (2013: 3) calls 'old public diplomacy', namely a 'one way flow of communication.' Hence the case-studies selected for this paper challenge the alleged rise of 'new' public diplomacy, described as 'dialogical, collaborative and inclusive'. New public diplomacy, says Pamment, 'represents a break from "broadcasting" models and takes advantage of social media to establish two-way engagement with the public' (ibid.). Despite investing time, money and other resources into developing a social media presence, the international broadcasting assets of neither Russia nor China - both representing different stages and experiences in the transition from authoritarian Communist rule - demonstrate any tangible evidence of furthering dialogue with their audiences. Hence it is possible to argue that, in analysing China and Russia, the conceptual differentiation between public diplomacy and propaganda is blurred (Rawnsley, 2013). This is not only suggested by the *content*, *style* and *motivation* of broadcasts, but also from their organisation and especially the close relationship between international broadcasting stations and the state. This brings to the surface the issue of credibility, the single most important factor in determining whether or not a particular broadcast will be interpreted as propaganda or public diplomacy. For Russia, its actions in the Ukraine and descriptions of them as part of an 'information' or 'media' war have brought into question the credibility of Russia's international news organisations; while the juxtaposition between how China would like to be seen via its international broadcasting capacity and popular perceptions of political life in China creates problems for Beijing's public diplomacy ambitions (Rawnsley, 2013). Therefore, in both case-studies it is possible to identify a clear 'credibility gap'.

However, in comparing China and Russia we find compelling differences in their public diplomacy strategies and the way they employ international broadcasting to further their public diplomacy objectives. The most striking is motivation: the Chinese have an abiding faith in the ability of international broadcasting to shape the global conversation about China, and an unshakeable belief that the Chinese must explain themselves and their behaviour to an international audience that allegedly misunderstands them. Hence public diplomacy activities are designed around the principle, 'To know us is to love us'. Liu Yunshan, the Director of the Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) summarised this conviction by claiming that 'a more powerful communication capability' means more 'effective global influence' (Edney, 2012: 95). In other words, the intangibles of public diplomacy can be converted via communication and international broadcasting into tangible foreign policy benefits.

Russia on the other hand has no such confidence in 'To know us is to love us.' Indeed, Russia's principal international news station, RT, spends little time covering stories and developments inside Russia, with most of its output focusing on global, and specifically American-centred stories that are openly critical of the US government's domestic and international behaviour. The American-educated director of Russia Today/RT has said she was surprised that in the US 'a person thinks it's necessary to explain his or her image, especially if a lot of people think he or she did something wrong. Whereas in Russia it's a common thing to hear "ne opravdivatsya" – "Don't explain."' This, she said, was a 'bad approach' and noted that it has taken a long time for Russia to understand the need to explain (Dougherty, 2013: 55). However, to date there is little

evidence of RT understanding the 'need to explain.' The fact that RT's gaze is not on Russia, but rather is fixed on presenting a critical representation of the US raises serious doubts about its role in 'public diplomacy' and suggests a more ideological and propaganda-based approach to international broadcasting. Observing RT Stewart Purvis, a former ITN Chief Executive, may be correct to observe that 'It's the soft power war that's replaced the cold war' (quoted in Halliday, 2014).

### The Global Media Landscape

The global news media environment is no longer dominated by the likes of CNN and the BBC; and the suspicion that news, information and entertainment flow in one direction – from West to East and South – is rightfully challenged by new multi-directional currents that originate from numerous sites around the world. Non-western networks, most famously Al-Jazeera broadcasting from Qatar, but also including Japan's NHK, Russia Today (renamed RT), China's CCTV-N, India's NDTV and Singapore's Channel News Asia are now available to viewers across the globe, often without subscription. Most edifying is that long-established stations, such as the BBC and CNN, are now picking up and using news material and film footage shot by other news organisations: global coverage of the terrorist attack in Nairobi's Westgate shopping mall in September 2013 routinely used film obtained from CCTV, while Russia Today was a major source of news about the development of Occupy Wall Street long before American news networks paid the movement any serious attention. In other words, CCTV and RT have made serious progress towards being accepted as legitimate news

organisations, and this has involved their adopting the approach and style of their competitors: 'Russia Today began to look and sound like any 24/7 news channel: the thumping music before the news flash, the earnest pretty newscasters, the jock-like sportscasters' (O'Sullivan, 2014). Using the formats and protocols familiar to global audiences while claiming to present alternative perspectives on the news not only reinforces their acceptability, but also helps to make viewers comfortable in their presence.

We should also note that while many western television networks are closing their foreign bureaus, and international radio broadcasting, offering ever-diminishing numbers of language services, is shifting to the internet, the new entrants to the field are investing heavily in expansion. China's CCTV, for example, has regional production centres in America (in Washington DC, opened in 2012) and Africa (in Nairobi, opened in January 2012), five central bureaus and 63 correspondents stationed overseas. Russia Today was launched in 2005 and has since been rebranded 'RT'. Like CCTV, RT has built a strong presence with 21 bureaus in 16 countries, including two in the US – in Washington DC and New York - and in October 2014 opened a UK-focused channel based in London with German and French services to follow. This level of rapid development means commercial and editorially independent channels like CNN are now competing for audiences with news providers who are structurally tied to the information machinery of particular states.

### Origins



This rapid expansion demonstrates the level of investment both China and Russia have devoted to creating a voice in the over-crowded media space that will amplify their public diplomacy agendas. China especially has identified as essential the growth and nurturing of its international broadcasting capacity as an instrument of soft power; and as Ramo (2007: 9) notes, this has both an international and domestic dimension, since China's image is a strategically important component of the country's continued modernisation: 'How China is perceived by other nations – and the underlying reality that perception reflects – will determine the future of Chinese development and reform'. These sentiments were echoed by Liu Yunshan, Director of the Propaganda Department of the CCP, who also identified the connection between China's growing eminence and what we might call 'soft power': 'Nowadays,' he said, 'nations which have more advanced skills and better capability in communications will be more influential in the world and can spread their values further' (quoted in Scotten and Hatchten, 2010: 113; Edney, 2012: 905). In a report published in 2011 Zhang Lisheng, CCTV's director of research and development, was very clear about the task ahead: 'CCTV,' he said, 'is not high status among international media. World-class media is [sic] evaluated by four indicators: international influence, ability to run operations, ability to scale, and new media influence. CCTV is only beginning to influence international opinion, and it cannot yet set the international agenda'.<sup>1</sup> Zhang's use of the term 'influence' here is very revealing as it confirms faith in international broadcasting's capacity to play an important role in China's public diplomacy activities and in changing the global conversation about the country.

The development of China's public diplomacy strategy, with international broadcasting as a key component, has reflected particular moments in the nation's modern history, meaning it is difficult to separate the media from the political sphere. The connection between the two has been and remains indelible. CCTV's predecessor was Beijing Television which launched in 1958, and was from the outset intended as a tool of party propaganda. Beijing Television was renamed CCTV in 1978, just as the post-Mao reform era was getting into its stride.

Coverage by the foreign media of the events in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989 demonstrated for the Chinese leadership the power of international public opinion in the new media age and the urgent need to challenge dominant narratives about China. While the authorities launched what the then Head of the BBC's Chinese Service, Elizabeth Wright, described as 'one of the most complete disinformation campaigns in the history of the Chinese Communist Party' (Walker, 1992: 140), they were also sensitive to the need for a new approach to international communications and the organization of China's official communications machinery. In 1990, when the communications technologies had advanced sufficiently to allow the Chinese to consider an overseas television service, CCTV began to broadcast beyond China's borders. CCTV opened a channel targeting audiences in East Asia, specifically Taiwan and the overseas Chinese. This was politically motivated: Taiwan is still considered a province of China and has been the recipient of Communist Party-inspired propaganda since the Republic of China retreated to the island in the late 1940s (Rawnsley, 2000); while the overseas Chinese are considered a crucial constituency in the motherland's continued development. In 1992, this service

became the basis for CCTV-4, China's first dedicated international channel for overseas audiences but broadcasting in Chinese.

More importantly for the evolution of China's public diplomacy, the leadership promoted the head of the propaganda apparatus to the Standing Committee of the Politburo, the Party's highest decision-making body, and created in 1991 the State Council Information Office (SCIO) to develop and lead China's international communications strategy (Brady, 2008; Edney, 2012: 905). With communications now right at the heart of China's policy-making machinery (an achievement matched by few states) broadcasters were instructed to be more pro-active in their conduct of public diplomacy on behalf of the nation and its international interests.

In September 2000 a new channel, CCTV-9, began broadcasting solely in English across China, but two years later was available in the US as part of a deal made with Rupert Murdoch in exchange for News Corporation's access to the China market. CCTV-9 became CCTV International in 2000, and was again rebranded in 2010 as CCTV News or CCTV-N. This final change, along with the introduction of on-air foreign anchors and presenters, reflected the station's ambition to be seen as a serious 24-hour news channel working to high standards of professional journalism, and to suggest to global audiences that CCTV was no longer simply the international propaganda mouthpiece for the Chinese government. This follows the renaming in English (and only in English) in 2004 of the Propaganda Department (*xuanchuanbu*) to Publicity Department (Brady, 2008). The Chinese terminology, incorporating the word 'propaganda' has not been altered, and its practice continues much as before. However, the change of name in English is important: It demonstrates China's growing

sensitivity to the way international audiences perceive its communication strategies and suggests awareness of the power of labels to influence whether and how communications are received and accepted. In the quest to live up to the mantra ‘To know us is to love us,’ the terms publicity and public diplomacy carry far fewer pejorative connotations than the more politically-loaded descriptor ‘propaganda’.

By 2008, public diplomacy was receiving serious attention at the highest levels of the Chinese government, thanks in part to their embrace of the ‘soft power.’ President Jiang Zemin called on China ‘to establish a publicity capacity to exert an influence on world opinion that is as strong as China’s international standing’ (quoted in Kurlantzick, 2007: 39) and described CCTV as ‘an important window through which China knows about the world and the world knows about China’ (China View, 2008). Just one year later the government invested an estimated US\$4 billion in expanding CCTV and the official Xinhua News Agency; Radio China International (RCI), broadcasting on both short- and medium-wave frequencies launched an internet service; CCTV increased its own foreign language provision, now broadcasting in English, French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic, and has dedicated services for Africa and North America; and in 2010 Xinhua unveiled its own English-language television channel, China News Network News Corporation (CNC). All of these channels are of course available to audiences around the world via the internet, while the *People’s Daily*, *China Daily* and *Global Times* all have a strong web presence too, including Twitter feeds (CCTV-America is particularly active on Twitter). Again this convergence of communications technologies reveals an understanding of how public diplomacy in the modern media age must be selective about the platforms used to reach

different audiences; and there is irony in the government's adoption of western-based social media for international consumers because the Chinese living within the borders of the PRC are prevented from accessing Twitter (as well as Facebook, Google and YouTube). This has clear public diplomacy implications, for as Bishop (2010) has asked, 'Can China really win hearts and minds when it is known as a country that blocks Facebook, Google, YouTube and Twitter?' In 2008, *China Daily* launched a US edition, followed by editions tailored for the Korean market (in 2010) and Africa (2012). Also in 2012 Xinhua revealed China's digital interactive e-magazine in Arabic, *China Panorama*.

Further, we should note that China's media have developed strong connections with other media groups across the world: By June 2010 CCTV co-operated with 279 organisations, and had developed 373 projects for broadcast by foreign media. Chinese media have also offered free content to local news organisations and have participated in the training of journalists, especially in Africa which is a major site of Chinese public diplomacy and economic investment:

More than 200 African government officers received Chinese training between 2004 and 2011 in order to produce what the Communist Party propaganda chief, Li Changchun, described as 'truthful' coverage of development supported by China's activities. This has been backed by an extensive programme of infrastructure development, with everything from satellite equipment for Ugandan television, to building work for Equatorial Guinea radio (Plaut, 2012).

This exhaustive list of activities – in international broadcasting alone – leaves no doubt that the authorities in Beijing believe public diplomacy depends on making sure Chinese sources remain the primary source of international news about China from Chinese perspectives.

Russia's international broadcasting too has experienced similar levels of investment. To cover the cost of developing news services in Arabic and Spanish, as well as the continued expansion of broadcasts in English and building a strong web presence and several language-specific Twitter feeds, RT's annual budget increased 'tenfold' – from US\$30 million in 2005 to over \$US300 million in 2013 (Bidder, 2013). In 2015, the government's investment in RT will rise (from 11.87 roubles in 2014) by 40 per cent to 15.38 billion roubles. November 2014 witnessed the launch of Russia's new multi-media news agency, Sputnik. Operating hubs in major cities across the world and producing broadcasting and web material in thirty languages, Sputnik is designed to counter the global media's anti-Russian bias; while Russia Beyond the Headlines, sponsored by Rossiyskya Gazeta (a Kremlin-funded newspaper) maintains a website and pays for inserts into major western newspapers.

Such levels of resourcing, investment and development are impressive when we recall that since April 2014, the BBC World Service is no longer protected from internal competition for funds. The station's privileged position which reflected its importance in British public diplomacy and guaranteed secure finance from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been removed. This has meant the complete closure of language services and the shift of some (including Mandarin) to internet only provision. It is therefore not surprising that some have chosen to view these developments as a new dynamic in the

competition for power between east and west. For example, John Whittingdale, chair of the British House of Commons Culture, Media and Sports Select Committee, has commented that 'We are being outgunned massively by the Russians and Chinese ... It's frightening the extent to which we are losing the information war' (quoted in Halliday, 2014). Measured by only the number of media platforms developed and the level of investment in international broadcasting, China and Russia should be doing much better than their more established but less resourced competitors. However, the fact that CCTV and RT struggle indicates the existence of deeper problems which reflect the design of their operation and the credibility of their organisation.

### Countering the global conversation

The idea of a Russian or Chinese perspective in global communication flows is absolutely central in explaining the public diplomacy strategy both pursue, and in understanding the mechanisms of its delivery through their international media. In each society political and intellectual elites have been vocal in challenging the alleged 'cultural imperialism' that in Russia and China structures much of the discourse – official and otherwise – on global communications. This idea suggests that there is an 'uneven pattern of international communication. The flow of information is basically one way: from West to East, North to South, and developed to developing countries' (Li Congjun, 2011). While President Putin announced to RT's staff that he expected them to 'break the monopoly of the Anglo-Saxon media' (Bidder, 2013), China's SARFT in 2001 decided it was important to

have Chinese voices heard in any location where major western outlets are able to present their audio and visual images, and let our radio, TV programs and films have significant international impacts, and substantially improve the current unfavourable situation that Western media is strong but Chinese media is weak in the international arena (Deng and Zhang, 2008: 153).

The reason SARFT felt that such instructions were necessary was because officials identified an urgent need to counter the alleged distortion and demonization of China in western media reports. Zhao Qizheng, the former director of the SCIO and China's leading proponent of public diplomacy, has claimed that few western news organisations cover China in what he has labelled the 'correct way' (though he fails to specify what the 'correct way' might look like). According to Zhao, this means 'the image of China in world public opinion is seriously inconsistent with the actual situation in China. All these background conditions magnify the urgency and importance of ... China's public diplomacy' (Zhao, 2012: 15). In short, Zhao expects China to 'present an accurate picture of itself to the world'. Now China is determined to 'resist the image and values imposed on it by the West and assert its own discourse rights' (Glasser and Murphy, 2009: 14).

The Kremlin likewise is concerned with the way Russia is portrayed in western media. In 2001, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, aide to President Putin, noted that 'Russia's outward image is ... gloomier and uniformly darker compared with reality' (quoted in Avgerinos, 2009: 121). In July 2012, President Putin described



soft power as 'all about promoting one's interests and policies through persuasion and creating a positive perception of one's country, based not just on its material achievements but also its spiritual and intellectual heritage' (Simons, 2014: 4). However, as noted above RT has chosen a different path that focuses more on critical reporting of the US and the American media – exposing the credibility gap between what American says and how it behaves - and devotes little attention to 'creating a positive perception' of Russia, reinforcing suspicions that the station is involved in Cold War-style propaganda rather than public diplomacy.

The Chinese government has gone one stage further beyond correcting western understandings of their country, and in addition to voicing concerns about cultural imperialism there is also evidence of a critique based on the perceived ambitions of western powers towards China. This is judged a more deliberate and sinister check on China's growth in which culture is but one aspect. Coverage in the international media of worldwide protests during the 2008 Olympic torch relay 'revived long-standing suspicions that US "cultural hegemony" was being used to weaken and destabilize China and led to calls for Beijing to combat this challenge' (McGiffert, 2009:14). So in 2012 President Hu Jintao made very clear his conviction that 'international forces are intensifying the strategic plot of Westernizing and dividing China,' and he claimed that 'ideological and cultural fields are the focal areas of their long-term infiltration' (Wong, 2012). Here we see how the difference between so-called soft and hard power is fragile – perhaps rendering the distinction not only difficult to make but also obsolete – and ultimately in the control of audiences: 'A target may find a sender's promotion of cultural and political values (such as democracy) to be an

act of coercion, not persuasion. A sender's cultural and political values themselves may be interpreted by a target state to be the potential source of threat to society' (Lee, 2011: 22).

In this framework it is possible to argue that the expansion of China's international broadcasting capacity is driven by an assessment of weakness, and that as a consequence public diplomacy is both reactive and defensive; and this is understandable given the 'China threat' discourse which has prevailed, especially in the US, since the 1990s. Even the country's growth and modernisation have been described as a threat, with the so-called 'China model' of development, itself considered a method of exercising soft power, routinely criticised. Mark Leonard (2005) described this model as 'the biggest ideological threat the West has felt since the end of the Cold War.'

The problem for China – and for Russia which likewise feels maligned by the western media, especially during the 2014 crisis in Ukraine – is that the way they are reported by foreign news organisations is beyond their control: the most presentable public diplomacy will not change news agendas. The best that RT and CCTV can hope for is to present a credible alternative to western news reporting – as RT has done with its coverage of both WikiLeaks and Occupy Wall Street - and perhaps influence the global conversation about China and Russia. Hence at the launch of CNC in July 2010, its President, Li Congjun, promised the station would 'offer an alternative source of information for a global audience and [...] promote peace and development by interpreting the world in a global perspective' (CNC, n.d.).

### Credibility

Yet influencing the global conversation is far from easy. The scope of the conversation is not under either Russia or China's control, but rather resides in the audience. There is no guarantee that the audience for international programming will decode the meaning of messages in a way the source would prefer, since interpretation occurs according to the prevailing cultural, social and political beliefs, attitudes and norms among individual audience members.

Second, the audience's image of a country is only partly determined by the media they access – western, Chinese or Russian. We must also take into account how viewers understand and experience each country: the cognitive dissonance (the psychological processing of information which conflicts with existing knowledge and values) that may prevent ready acceptance of more positive images. The best public diplomacy campaign will find it difficult to compete with the reality of human rights abuses, treatment of dissidents, domestic problems in governance, behaviour towards Tibet or Ukraine. The house arrest of Nobel prize winner Liu Xiaobo by Chinese authorities, or the deliberate murder of passengers on Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 in 2014 will immediately undermine the credibility (which is conferred or denied by audiences according to how they interpret the actions and behaviour of governments) of any public diplomacy campaign; and as Joseph Nye pointed out in *The Future of Power* (2011), in today's fluid and inclusive information environment 'political struggles occur over the creation and destruction of credibility' (Nye, 2011: 103).

It is essential for public diplomacy to align the message with policy, and to consider the experience, perceptions and expectations of individual audiences tuning into its international broadcasts (in Cull's taxonomy, successful

international broadcasting depends on *listening* to the audience). In the modern media age, alignment is especially important. When communications technologies now shatter the boundaries between domestic and international domains, and space/time are no longer as relevant as they once were, political actors and broadcasters are speaking to multiple audiences simultaneously. This means any inconsistencies or contradictions in messages across platforms, or between messages and events, or even between geographical targets, impact on and ultimately damage the source's credibility. Writing about US public diplomacy after 9/11, Nye noted that 'What appealed at home, failed abroad' (Nye, 2010: 5). For China's public diplomacy, the formal separation of propaganda intended for Chinese audiences at home (*duinei xuanchuan*) and foreign audiences residing in the PRC or elsewhere in the world (*duwai xuanchuan*) is now out of date. What is said in the news on CCTV-1 in Chinese for Chinese audiences must be consistent with the programming in English on CCTV-N and with Twitter feeds for CCTV-America and the *People's Daily*; and the credibility of the message can be damaged in an instant by film and photos taken by witnesses or 'citizen journalist' on a mobile telephone, uploaded to the internet and distributed around the world in seconds, and even as the recorded event is unfolding. This is the reality of conducting public diplomacy in the new communications landscape. Mark Twain is credited with saying, 'A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes'; one wonders what Twain would have made of Twitter.

At the time of writing (Autumn/Winter 2014) RT is finding its own credibility seriously challenged by events and therefore its value as an instrument of Russian public diplomacy undermined. Many commentators and

observers, and even some of its own staff, have accused the station of crossing the admittedly thin and sometimes arbitrary line between public diplomacy and propaganda. Liz Wahl, a former Washington-based correspondent for RT-America, resigned on air saying: 'I cannot be part of a network funded by the Russian government that whitewashes the actions of Putin ... [I] believe in disseminating the truth, and that is why, after this newscast, I'm resigning' (Carroll, 2014). Wahl was followed in July by RT's London correspondent, Sara Firth, who announced her resignation on Twitter, revealing what she called a 'disrespect for facts' concerning the downing of Flight MH17. Most worrying for RT, in November 2014 its UK offshoot was warned by the British media regulator Ofcom that its broadcasts had failed 'to preserve due partiality' in reporting the crisis in Ukraine. If 'To know us is to love us,' then for Russia that 'quest ...is proving to be difficult in spite of a lot of time, money and effort being spent on various programmes' (Simons, 2014: 48) precisely because of Russia's behaviour. We also need to be mindful that Russia, 'as yet unable to define its own values, takes an "oppositional" approach to soft power, seeking to improve Russia's image by undermining the narrative projected by the United States. To accomplish this goal Russia does not need to carry out a full frontal assault on Western values; it can simply "relativize" the values promoted by the West' (Dougherty, 2013: 96). By positioning Russia as 'different from the US', RT's value – and credibility – in public diplomacy diminishes, and perception of its propaganda role grows. This position as an alternative, a more palatable 'other' contradicts the central tenets of Russia's earlier public diplomacy strategy: 'to build and project to the world an image of a country where the economy is booming and democracy is developing' (The *Washington Post*'s Peter Finn, 2008,

quoted in Avgerinos, 2009: 121). The earlier more positive message about Russia in RT broadcasts is conceding ground to the more negative message about the US.

Another major challenge to a station's credibility is its relationship with, and location within, the state machinery. Neither CCTV nor RT can escape the fact that they have a very strong relationship with their governments in Beijing and Moscow. CCTV is actually embedded within the state structure via its responsibility to, and management by SARFT, the Communist Party's Office of External Propaganda and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Brady, 2008). Control of public diplomacy by the Party-State apparatus is clear: 'While it is often those within the foreign affairs community who are the most enthusiastic about accessing and improving China's soft power,' Edney has observed that '... the bulk of the work ... is not primarily controlled by the foreign affairs bureaucracy but rather by the propaganda authorities' (Edney, 2012: 902). Over in Moscow Margarita Simonyan, Director of RT, told researcher Jill Dougherty that she talks 'daily' with the Kremlin (Dougherty, 2013: 55).

Certainly China's international broadcasters have made significant progress in their evolution from the old-style and simplistic authoritarian model of communication, namely: We speak, you listen; and interviews with members of CCTV-N suggest that the station is no longer merely a mouthpiece for government propaganda (Brady, 2008; Jirik n.d.). In fact, foreign-language broadcasts intended for audiences outside China are often allowed to be more critical and liberal in tone and content than their Chinese-language counterparts, and CCTV-N enjoys 'more room to push the boundaries than other stations' (Brady, 2008: 167-8). But there are limits of course: As the Controller of what in

2004 was still called CCTV-9 noted, 'We are taking greater efforts to minimize the tone of propaganda, to balance our reports, and to be objective. But we definitely won't be reporting as much negative domestic news as the western media' (Jirik, n.d.). It seems that the creation of a Chinese CNN will have to wait.

### Audience: Outputs and Impacts

As neither RT nor CCTV undertake any systematic audience research, it is impossible to state with accuracy how many viewers each station attracts. Certainly both boast impressive audience numbers: CCTV claims to cover '98 percent of the world ... with 45 million subscribers outside China' (Zhang, 2011: 63), while RT asserts a regular audience of 700 million, with 1.4 million subscribers to its Youtube channel. Research by others lends little credibility to such claims. In her study of CCTV-9 Zhang (2011: 63) has noted that 'a three-year internet survey showed that 39 percent of the viewers were non-Chinese outside China, 3 percent were non-Chinese in China, and 58 percent were Chinese, with the majority (43 percent) of them from *within* China' (emphasis added).

Meanwhile, the British-based Broadcasting Audience Research Board (BARB) has measured RT's audience in the UK and found that between 27 October and 2 November 2014, 395,000 people viewers watched the channel, amounting to only 0.7 percent of the potential weekly audience: 'Some 108,000 people watched the channel on average each day, meaning it has marginally fewer viewers than S4C, the state-funded Welsh-language broadcaster ...' (Smith, 2014).

CCTV and RT are therefore referring in their advertising to *potential* audience size; to viewers who may be able to watch the channels provided they subscribe to or have access to satellite/cable packages that include them. There is no reliable data to support claims of either 45 million or 700 million. This indicates that China and Russia, like most public diplomacy agents around the world, obsess about the outputs rather than the impacts of their soft power strategies, which is understandable given that outputs are quantifiable and are attractive to bureaucratic machineries fighting for resources and looking for immediate returns on investment. However, outputs such as viewing figures tell us nothing about how audiences respond to the programmes they watch, nor if their attitudes or behaviour towards the source have changed as a consequence of engaging with its international broadcasting.

Polling data suggests that there is no correlation between expenditure on soft power activities, including international broadcasting, and positive changes in attitudes towards China. In fact, the polls reveal a reversal of fortune *despite* the huge investment in public diplomacy, and one can argue that this is due to negative perceptions of China's policy and behaviour, especially among China's neighbours.<sup>2</sup> Russia's poll ratings abroad have likewise 'become increasingly unfavourable since 2004' and 'Russia's efforts to strengthen its image as a trustworthy and cooperative partner among Western audiences have been, thus far, unsuccessful', notwithstanding the Kremlin's investment in soft power and public diplomacy activities (Avgerinos, 2009: 116). Svetlana Babaeva, working for the Russian state news agency, RIA Novosti, admitted to Avgerinos (2009: 12) that 'Russian officials are ... disappointed with the results':



“I remember very well during Putin’s first term, there was a strong desire to explain Russia’s position and attitude. In that period, Russia Today was created,” she said. ... Yet, since then, the Kremlin has grown increasingly frustrated because the West still does not accept, understand, or want to understand Russia. According to Babaeva ...

“There is a feeling that we are explaining, but the whole world still hates us, so why should we explain?”

Why do they hate us? The Americans asked exactly the same question after 9/11, and as they soon discovered to their cost, ‘To know us is to love us’ is doomed for failure if the message and the reality perceived/experienced by audiences consuming the public diplomacy campaign are out of alignment. Credibility is everything, and in public diplomacy actions will always speak louder than words. In this context, Hongying Wang (2011: 52) has acknowledged ‘the difficulty of effective image projection, especially in circumstances in which the targeted audience already views the image-projecting country poorly.’ Public diplomacy faces an uphill struggle.

### Conclusions

The expansion of international broadcasting as a tool of public diplomacy by both the Russian and Chinese governments reflects an unshakeable confidence in the power of media and communications to surmount and possibly change the attitudes of audiences: that greater exposure to news, information and culture will reap tangible benefits. There is an urgent need to help shape and manage global conversations about both nations, and to remedy alleged defects in the

way western media understand Russia and China. ‘To know us is to love us,’ a common soft power maxim, is clearly guiding China’s public diplomacy strategy which is confident that the size of the campaign, the number of platforms and the number of viewers are a marker of success. However, more communication does not necessarily mean better or more readily accepted communication. As polling data suggests, Russia and China are both struggling to convert the intangibility of public diplomacy into tangible changes in international opinion.

Both the Chinese and Russian governments consider their impressive levels of investment in international broadcasting a necessary and valuable corrective to a distorted flow of global communications that privilege western media over those from the east or south. In public diplomacy terms this extends beyond simply having a voice: it structures perceptions about *influence*, for at the heart of cultural imperialism lies a belief that command over the direction of news, information and culture is a reflection of *economic* power and translates into *strategic* and *political* power. But both China and Russia do have access to the international broadcasting landscape. The challenge now is to convert that access into credibility and trust in the long term, and this depends more on their political behaviour at home and abroad, and less on disseminating a particularly positive message that may or may not be acted upon.

While no actor could sustain a foreign policy driven entirely by the whims of its target audience, the actor would do well to identify the point where foreign opinion and its own policy part company and work hard to close the gap or explain the divergence (Cull, 2008a: 47).

The case-studies presented in this paper remind us to be careful in constructing a strict dichotomy between propaganda and public diplomacy. Indeed, if we accept that the 'power' in soft power ultimately resides with the audience who choose first whether to watch a particular television station, and second whether to accept and act upon the message broadcast, then the semantic difference between the two communication activities likewise lies with the consumers: One man's public diplomacy may well be another man's propaganda. Whether we view such activity as propaganda or public diplomacy, there is no doubt that renewed competition for access to the global media space is transforming how producers, audiences and governments interact. This is seen most clearly in the way RT and CCTV-N have adopted familiar news formats, conventions and protocols that help attract audiences and make them feel comfortable. While wishing to present an alternative to CNN, Al-Jazeera and the BBC, RT and CCTV-N have appropriated their characteristics, even employing foreign reporters, anchors and commentators to reinforce their respectability and legitimacy. At the same time, while CCTV aims to correct what the Chinese government sees as the prevailing distorted picture of China, RT downplays the positive projection of Russia to focus more on a new information Cold War with the United States. Russian public diplomacy via the media is left to multi-media platforms such as Sputnik and Russia Beyond the Headlines, while RT, CCTV, China's *Global Times*, Xinhua and *People's Daily* are particularly energetic on Twitter. Most public diplomacy activity is now located away from traditional media and is embedded in the sphere of social media where the number of followers, re-Tweets and 'Likes' provides an easy-to-measure indicator of audience size; and where, by reading the postings of followers and 'friends', it is possible to begin to gauge the

impact of messages and reports. In this way public diplomacy is now characterised by the convergence of platforms where 'old' and 'new' media work together and complement each other, and require us to expand both the definition and our understanding of 'international broadcasting'.

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### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> 'CCTV research director Zhang Lisheng: Innovation and development, building a world-class media,' Sina blog, 8 January 2011, available at

<http://news.sina.com.cn/m/2011-01-08/145421782330.shtml>, accessed 7

August 2014.

<sup>2</sup> See the following surveys for further details: BBC World Service (March 2005); Brown and Wu (22 May 2009); Pew Research Center (2010); BBC World Service (March 2011); Pew Research Center (2014).

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